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A Note on Ceremonial Purification among the Wa'ndau, Nyasaland. 55

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One of the effects of European influence in Africa is the breaking up of tribal organization and discipline. The rights of the individual being no longer subordinated to the common good, customs formerly observed by the village community as a whole die out, while those affecting the individual are still practised.

This tendency is well seen in the ancient ceremonies of purification among the Wa'ndau which are now rarely performed collectively, though the native, however lightly "educated," still goes to the doctor to obtain the necessary medicines for removing, for instance, the contamination caused by contact with a corpse.

These collective ceremonies have already been described by various writers in respect of both Nyasaland and elsewhere,[1] but the Yao sites have not, I think, been given in detail, and the following notes may not, therefore, be altogether valueless.

The *Fyajila* ceremony (*fyaja'ila*, "to sweep") is common to most Bantu tribes. In its simplest form it used to be performed annually by the Wa'ndau, at the beginning of the twelfth month, most of the months (moon) being kept by means of a "calendar."[2] The whole village is thoroughly "spring-cleaned," all rubbish

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* In this, when the game is played, an old female sings to the warriors, Father Hamilton-Kerr (p.c.) tells me, the song is typically one—

Yaou, yaou, speedily to range,
Yaou, yaou, they seek
Yaou, yaou, where you seek,
Yaou, yaou, I shall not be there any more.

Words adapted, presumably, to the hidden doll.

1 Cf. Macmillan, W. C., "The Bark Scrolls," pp. 200 sqq., 2 vols. Around Myers, Boston (p.c.) American Ethnology, 1924.

2 Cf. Evans, "Before the Beginning," ch., 270, 280.

3 A "calendar" consists of a string tied to the wall of the house, or hanging from the gable, on which are threaded twelve pieces of wood, feathers or cowrie-shells. One of these is moved to the other end of the string each time a new month is seen.